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Prepared by the
DHS Office of
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Articles in Today's Clips

Wednesday, April 16, 2008

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Missaukee woman's parental rights going on trial

By Matt Whetstone

LAKE CITY - A Missaukee County judge must determine what's best for the 4-year-old son of Amy and Frank Musselman.

On Tuesday, Probate Judge Charles Parsons laid out the process for the termination of Amy Musselman's parental rights. The request was made by Missaukee County Prosecutor Bill Donnelly on behalf of the Department of Human Services.

Amy Musselman is currently being treated for major depressive disorder with psychosis in a downstate hospital. She was found not guilty by reason of insanity in the Sept. 13, 2006 shooting death of her 7-year-old daughter, Alyssa.

Despite the not guilty verdict, the judge determined there was enough evidence to prove Amy Musselman was responsible for her daughter's death but her mental condition trumped that ruling.

Her condition along with the judge's ruling that she was responsible for Alyssa's death are included in the complaint. The complaint also says the likelihood for her to harm remains strong while treatment continues.

Parsons ordered Amy Musselman's parental rights temporarily terminated during court proceedings. However, her attorney, Bill Barnett, can file a motion seeking to reinstate those rights.

Parsons said the matter will be determined via a bench trial. One portion of the trial must conclude that the final decision is best for the child, Parsons said.

The trial is scheduled to take place July 15 and 16 in Missaukee County Probate Court.

Donnelly asked the court to consider the facts that were addressed in the murder trial held last fall. Parsons said the rules of evidence will apply in the probate matter.

Barnett then asked Parsons to allow parent-child assessment conducted on Amy Musselman and her son. Parsons granted the request, saying it should take place as soon as possible.

"I think that's wise in this case," Donnelly said.

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Parents, authorities work to protect children from sexual abuse crimes

- by Yvonne Swager

Montmorency County Tribune

April 16, 2008

Numbers of reported crimes against children are decreasing, but that may not mean fewer crimes are being committed.

"Sexual abuse has been declining over the last 10 or 15 years, partly because people are talking about it more," said Janis Wolak, research assistant professor at the University of New Hampshire's Crimes Against Children Research Center.

Parents should be candid with children regarding how inappropriate it is for sex, even in the form of passing comments, to be introduced into some relationships.

"Parents need to be open with children and acknowledge the fact having sexual feelings is normal, but also there are adults out there who will take advantage of that," Wolak said.

Many offenders are not violent and have high levels of social skills, she said, but they don't know how to form sexual relationships with adults.

"They may be immature in some ways, and youths don't always recognize that," Wolak said.

Many policies have been put in place to help protect children, she said, such as scouting programs that require two unrelated adults be present with children. Parents don't need to be nervous about every situation.

"We don't want to foster suspicions of everyone, but there need to be open discussions," according to Wolak.

It's important for people to realize there is no stereotype for people who abuse children, she said, and abused children are usually victims of people they know.

Montmorency County currently has 34 individuals listed in the Michigan Sex Offender Registry. In 2005, 14 individuals in the county were charged with criminal sexual conduct. By 2007, that number dropped to four.

According to Terrie Case, county prosecutor, that doesn't necessarily mean the situation is improving.

"I think people just aren't getting caught," Case said.

As the former assistant prosecutor in Monroe, Case said she handled a variety of criminal sexual conduct cases. When she began working in Montmorency County, she said she was shocked.

"Initially when I started here, there seemed to be more of those cases than anything," Case said. "There seemed to be just as many cases up here, and the population there was much greater."

In some situations here, she said victims had been abused for years. She said she was persistent in pursuing convictions in those cases, even though some of the convictions took as long as three years.

Case said she plans to continue pursuing convictions of those who commit crimes against children and is ready to take on a new aspect of criminal behavior. Internet predators are becoming more of a problem, she said, and she's looking to attend a seminar for prosecutors to gain more insight.

"I want to learn more about how these crimes are committed and how to prosecute them," she said.

Stop It Now! has a hotline to help both victims of sexual abuse and those who think they may eventually harm a child. Those who would like to contact the hotline can call 1-800-4-A-Child or 1-800-422-4453.



THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Boy may face treatment in sex assault

Plea agreement in case

Wednesday, April 16, 2008

BY TOM TOLEN

The Ann Arbor News

A 10-year old Howell area boy pleaded no contest to reduced charges of sexual assault involving a 7-year-old boy on a school bus last year.

The boy will be sentenced May 23 in Livingston County Juvenile Court. He pleaded no contest Monday to charges of second-degree criminal sexual conduct and gross indecency between males in exchange for a charge of first-degree criminal sexual conduct being dismissed.

Authorities have said he and an 11-year-old boy sexually assaulted the 7-year-old on a school bus last May.

The 11-year-old was earlier placed on two years of probation and ordered to undergo random drug and alcohol testing and counseling. He pleaded no contest to gross indecency between males, and charges of first- and second-degree criminal sexual conduct were dropped.

A no contest plea is not an admission of guilt, but is treated as such for sentencing purposes.

Livingston County Prosecutor David Morse said the plea agreement with the 10-year-old was stricter "because (the other boy) was more forthcoming about his role."

"The big concern by my staff was this kid needed treatment and now has the opportunity to get the counseling he needs," Morse said. "If he is not successful in counseling, he's back to square one."

If the 10-year-old successfully completes the treatment program, the conviction will be stricken from his record. He was represented by Howell attorney James Balmforth, who did not return calls for comment.

The case was originally set to go to trial today.

Tom Tolen can be reached at ttolen@livingstoncommunitynews.com or at 810-844-2009.

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ClickOnDetroit.com

Boy Pleads No Contest In Howell Bus Sex Incident

POSTED: 7:30 am EDT April 16, 2008

UPDATED: 9:55 am EDT April 16, 2008

HOWELL, Mich. -- A 10-year-old Howell boy accused of forcing a first-grader to perform a sex act while on a school bus has pleaded no contest to a charge of gross indecency between males.

In exchange for the boy's plea, prosecutors dismissed a charge of first-degree criminal sexual conduct and his name will not be added to the state's sex offender registry.

The boy was to go to trial Wednesday in Livingston County Juvenile Court.

The boy's attorney, James Balmforth, and his mother declined to comment.

An 11-year-old co-defendant pleaded no contest last month to gross indecency and received two years probation.

A no-contest plea is not an admission of guilt but is treated as such for sentencing purposes.

Previous Stories:

- February 22, 2008: [Boy Accused In Bus Assault Accepts Plea Deal](#)
- February 12, 2008: [Details To Be Released In Suspected Bus Assault](#)
- September 19, 2007: [Boys Charged With Forcing 7-Year-Old To Perform Oral Sex On Bus](#)

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April 16, 2008

Hearing postponed in shooting of boy, 14

Plea bargain case rescheduled for foster brother, 16

Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

Ed Austin and his mother, Mary, drove from Marcellus Tuesday to hear a teenager explain what led to the shooting of Ed Austin's 14-year-old son, Daniel.

They will have to wait another week, after the plea hearing was unexpectedly halted.

Thomas Mack, 16, faces murder charges in the April 3, 2007 shooting. He is charged as an adult in the death of Daniel, his foster brother.

"I really wanted to hear him tell his side of what actually happened," said Mary Austin, 65.

Ed Austin, 44, added: "I just want to make sure that he learns his lesson, so this doesn't happen to another family."

Both said they have forgiven Mack, who was 15 years old when the shooting happened.

During Tuesday's hearing, attorneys were telling Ingham County Circuit Judge James Giddings the minimum sentence Mack would face, when Giddings called prosecutors as well as Mack's attorney to the bench.

Under a proposed plea agreement, Mack had intended to plead guilty to second-degree murder.

After several minutes of discussions at the bench, Giddings stopped the hearing and called the attorneys into his chambers.

The hearing was later rescheduled for April 22.

"There were some issues that came up during the course of the hearing," said Ingham County Prosecutor Stuart Dunning III, who was not present at the hearing.

"I was consulted, and I indicated that in order to comply with our obligations under the Victims' Rights Act, I requested an adjournment."

Dunning would not comment further.

Mack's attorney, Keith Watson, would not comment on what happened.

"It would be inappropriate for me to do that," Watson said.

Mack, who is charged as an adult, appeared in court Tuesday in a black-and-white striped jail uniform.

He had a thin mustache.

The shooting happened in an apartment at 319 E. Hillsdale St., where the foster parents' son, Christopher Stragier, then 18, lived.

The foster parents are Steve and Judy Stragier of Lansing.

Mack, Daniel and another foster brother were in the apartment when the shooting happened.

Stragier said at a court hearing last year that he had taken in the three boys overnight to give his parents a break.

When Stragier went to work the day of the shooting, he left Mack, Daniel and the other boy in his apartment with an assault rifle and a loaded 12-gauge shotgun, according to the testimony.

Police found Daniel with a shotgun wound in his left cheek that exited the back right of his head.

The Stragiers' foster license is no longer active, according to Michigan Department of Human Services records.

Daniel, who was born in Allegan, lived with different relatives after his mother died of unknown causes in 2003.

Mary Austin tried to care for Daniel, who suffered from behavioral problems as well as a form of autism. She said she was unable to because her husband was severely ill and Daniel required constant attention.

Before that, another relative had tried to take him in.

Ed Austin separated from Daniel's mother before Daniel was born.

He said he was not able to care for Daniel because he suffers from bipolar disorder. He has lived on disability benefits for decades.

"I just want justice for Daniel," he said.

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or kgrasha@lsj.com.

Detroit Free Press

April 16, 2008

SHELBY TOWNSHIP: Officer suspended over domestic violence charge

A Shelby Township police officer was suspended without pay Tuesday while his department investigates assault and domestic violence charges.

The officer is accused of beating his wife after a weekend birthday celebration, according to the Oakland County Sheriff's Office.

Sheriff's deputies from the Rochester Hills substation found David Essad, 34, lying on the side of the road, apparently intoxicated, with his arms outspread at 12:15 a.m. Saturday.

A witness had called 911, saying that he'd seen a man beat a woman in a parking lot on Rochester near Tienken.

When deputies arrived, Essad's wife exited the vehicle and walked to police. Her hair, face and shirt were bloodied, according to a news release.

Essad was arraigned Saturday on charges of felonious assault and aggravated domestic violence. He was released Monday from the Oakland County Jail after paying 10% of a \$20,000 bond, records show.

Police arrest ex-boyfriend in stabbing case

Posted by [Kristin Longley | Jackson Citizen Patriot](#) April 16, 2008 10:35AM

Parma-Sandstone police have apprehended 48-year-old Jimmie Ray Cole, who is charged with attempted murder in connection with the stabbing of his ex-girlfriend.

Police allege Cole beat 42-year-old Hattie Summa of Jackson about the face and head and stabbed her with a kitchen knife on Monday before fleeing the scene in her SUV.

Parma-Sandstone Police Chief Jon Sutliff said authorities received a phone call this morning from Cole's brother, which led to Cole's arrest. He was picked up at his brother's Springport home without resistance, Sutliff said.

Cole is being lodged in the Jackson County jail pending arraignment.

For more on this story, visit mlive.com/citpat Thursday or [pick up](#) Thursday's Citizen Patriot.



Police: Stabber still at large

Wednesday, April 16, 2008

By Steven Hepker

shepker@citpat.com -- 768-4923

The 5-inch blade of a kitchen knife was buried in Hattie Summa's back when the Jackson woman arrived at Foote Hospital on Monday night.

Police are still looking for her ex-boyfriend, Jimmie Rae Cole, who is charged with several felony counts, including attempted murder, in connection with the stabbing, the county Prosecutor's Office announced Tuesday.

Parma-Sandstone Police Chief Jon Sutliff said authorities believe Cole, 48, fled the scene Monday in the victim's car, a 2005 Chevy Trailblazer with license plate BDG 0722.

Cole also is charged with felonious assault, auto theft and aggravated domestic violence. He faces up to life in prison if convicted of attempted murder.

"This individual has a criminal past and should be considered dangerous," Prosecutor Hank Zavislak said.

As of Tuesday morning, Sutliff said Summa's injuries were not life-threatening and that she had one stab wound.

She was being treated at the University of Michigan Medical Center, where a representative did not know her condition Tuesday night.

"It just barely missed her lung," Chief Assistant Prosecutor Mark Blumer said of the stab wound.

The knife missed her organs and arteries but required surgical removal after the blade broke off in her back, police said. Summa, 42, was flown by helicopter from Foote to Ann Arbor.

Police said Cole sought the victim out at her job to ask her to take him to his home, 6113 W. Michigan Ave. in Sandstone Township.

During an argument on the front lawn, police said Summa was beaten about the face and head and stabbed once in the back.

A passer-by reported seeing the attack at 6:35 p.m. and called 911.

Cole had fled the scene before police arrived, Sutliff said.

Anyone with information regarding the vehicle or its occupant should call 911 or the Jackson County TIP line at 787-0212.

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Medicaid cuts could cost jobs

Study: Michigan would lose 15,300 workers, \$732 million under Bush plan

By Chad Selweski
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

Bush administration cuts proposed for the Medicaid program could cost Michigan 15,300 jobs and \$732 million in federal funding, according to a study released by a national nonprofit group Tuesday.

Families USA calculated the impact of Medicaid rule changes sought by the White House and concluded that the funding losses would hurt the health care industry and then create a ripple effect across the state. The group estimated the overall loss of business activity at \$1.5 billion.

Beyond the economic implications, U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow and U.S. Rep. John Dingell said the proposed rule changes for Medicaid, a joint federal-state health care program, would reduce services for foster care children, abused children, the developmentally disabled and physically disabled.

Ron Pollack, executive director of the nonpartisan Families USA, said several prior attempts by the White House to win congressional approval for the revisions have failed. In response, the administration is relying on executive procedures to try to make the move unilaterally.

"They can't get it through Congress - the votes are not there - so they turn to this process of regulation," Stabenow said. "It's the wrong priorities and the wrong values."

Bush administration officials have said they're trying to bring down the cost of rapidly growing federal entitlement programs and make Medicaid spending "more transparent."

The Medicaid program carries a \$400 billion federal price tag annually and serves 59 million low-income Americans.

Since the administration first unveiled the seven rule changes last year, Congress has imposed a moratorium that blocks the implementation. That moratorium will expire in May but legislation pending in the House and Senate would extend the moratorium for one year. In the House, the bill will be taken up today by the Commerce Committee which Dingell chairs.

"This will hurt those most who can afford it least," said Dingell, a Dearborn Democrat. "We look forward to standing the administration on its ear and

protecting the most vulnerable."

Stabenow and Dingell participated in a teleconference call with news reporters Tuesday to discuss the Families USA study. Also commenting was Janet Olszewski, director of the Michigan Department of Community Health.

Olszewski predicted the cuts would have a "catastrophic impact" in Michigan, with an estimated 21,000 developmentally disabled and 27,000 children with medical conditions losing their Medicaid services.

For every \$1 state government spends on the Medicaid program it receives \$1.39 from the federal government. The state, Olszewski said, cannot afford to make up the federal funding loss.

The effect of the changes on Michigan would multiply over time, with an estimated \$3.9 billion in federal funding cuts over five years.

Across the nation, the sweeping rule changes - an overall \$50 billion reduction over five years - has generated bipartisan opposition from the National Governors Association and a federal lawsuit filed by a coalition of public hospitals.

Click here to return to story:

http://www.macombdaily.com/stories/041608/loc_local02.shtml

Medicaid plan would cost Michigan business, group says

By TODD SPANGLER • FREE PRESS WASHINGTON STAFF • April 15, 2008

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WASHINGTON – Using one of the U.S. government's own formulas for figuring out the impact of regulatory change, a group advocating for affordable health care argued Tuesday that Bush administration plans to change Medicaid could cost Michigan billions of dollars in lost business and thousands of jobs.

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Families USA, which is based in Washington, unveiled research suggesting Michigan could lose \$1.5 billion in business activity, \$572 million in wages and 15,300 jobs in the first year of the Medicaid rule changes if they are put in place.

Today, in the wake of the report, House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman John Dingell, a Dearborn Democrat, is expected to move legislation which would place a moratorium on the Bush proposals for one year – and a new president and Congress are in office.

“We are looking forward to standing the administration on its ear,” said Dingell.

Late last year, the Bush administration abandoned earlier efforts to move the regulatory changes through Congress, instead putting them in effect through executive order and without the agreement of Democratic leaders.

According to the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation, which provides research on health care issues to policymakers, those regulations would have various effects, including prohibiting states from using federal funds to help pay for physician training; putting new reimbursement limits on Medicaid payments to government-operated hospitals and nursing homes; and placing restrictions on coverage of rehabilitation services to people with disabilities.

By limiting what it the federal government pays for, states would not receive as much in matching money. At present, the federal government provides a match of \$1.39 for every \$1 Michigan spends on Medicaid.

Congressional leaders – and some Republican members – have been howling since the changes were announced. Dingell said every governor in the nation is against them as well.

At a hearing earlier this month, an administration official said the changes are needed to “apply fiscal accountability in Medicaid.” But Families USA and Dingell on Tuesday criticized the move as one which would have devastating effects not only on the people Medicaid serves but in a state like Michigan, which already is having its share of financial woes.

“The word I use is ‘havoc,’” Janet Olszewski, director of Michigan’s Department of Community Health, said of the changes’ potential impact.

Unable to make up the federal matching dollars which would be lost to the state, Michigan would most likely be “forced to cut eligibility groups or eliminate whole categories of services” from the Medicaid menu, she said. That could mean cutting programs to help people with developmental disabilities function or pay to train Michigan’s supply of physicians.

The changes, Olszewski said, “would absolutely wreak havoc on low income, vulnerable residents of Michigan.”

Families USA, however, said its research shows the impact would be even more far reaching.

There’s been something of a debate over how much the regulation changes would cost, depending on where you stand. While the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, for one, says the regulations would save just under \$20 billion in five years’ time, states say, collectively, they stand to lose nearly \$50 billion in federal matching funds over that same period.

That \$50 billion figure translates into about \$732 million Michigan would lose in the first year. Families USA then took that figure, plugged it into a formula the Commerce Department developed to measure economic inputs — the department’s Bureau of Economic Analysis touts it for showing the costs or benefits of everything from military base closings to power outages — not to mention “policy changes or regulatory effects” — and came up with a much larger impact on the state’s economy.

“The first wave hits people in the medical industry,” said Ron Pollack, Families USA’s executive director. “Ultimately what occurs is when people lose income, it spreads to other parts of the economy.”

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Studies, part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, did not return a call for comment on the report today. But officials have previously told some media outlets, including Congressional Quarterly, that the states’ \$50 billion figure — which came out through a report done by the House Oversight Committee — was not credible. The White House has put the federal savings at about \$15 billion over five years.

Dingell said a coalition of lawmakers from both parties are working together to put the one-year moratorium on the regulatory changes in place and that the savings could be made up in two ways — first by requiring states to use electronic means of verifying the assets of applicants, and by borrowing money from a physicians assistance fund which would later be paid back.

Contact **TODD SPANGLER** at 202-906-8203 or at tspangler@freepress.com.

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ClickOnDetroit.com

New Number For Wayne County Assistance Changes

POSTED: 2:39 pm EDT April 15, 2008
UPDATED: 4:40 pm EDT April 15, 2008

DETROIT -- People receiving food assistance benefits in Wayne County can now use a toll-free number, 1-877-272-6999, to report changes in their household that impact eligibility for assistance.

The Wayne County Department of Human Services Change Reporting Center was launched on Tuesday. Individuals can call the number to report any changes affecting their benefits, including address, income, employment, family size, utilities, child support or child care.

Wayne County has more than 173,000 active food assistance cases, according to a news release from the Michigan Department of Human Services. In comparison, the release said, Oakland and Macomb counties have 31,000 and 33,000 respectively.

The center will be open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays.

For more information go to www.michigan.gov/dhs.

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Manistee News Advocate • Friday, April 4, 2008

Volunteer transportation program effective, but more drivers needed

By CHRISTINE BATZER
STAFF WRITER

If you're out there wondering where all the good people have gone, well, maybe some of them are right here — the Manistee-Benzie Department of Human Services volunteer program for volunteer drivers.

"They drive people to primarily medical appointments, or some other things like social security or employment related things, or the Health Department," explained Cosette Schaefer, DHS community resource coordinator/contract administrator.

The medical rides are mostly covered by Medicaid, but the others are paid for by a special fund which is limited. "We transport people to homeless shelters. If someone shows up homeless and needs to go somewhere we transport them to Traverse City, Muskegon, Cadillac or Holland most frequently, it depends on who has an opening," she said.

Most of the people that need help with transportation are seniors or disabled. The travel costs are reimbursed by the agency,

"We are getting request for sixty to one-hundred rides a week. We are actually, for the first time since I've been doing this, having to tell people we don't have a driver."

— Cosette Schaefer,

DHS community resource coordinator

but, other than that, the program is all volunteer.

"We are getting requests for sixty to one-hundred rides a week. We are actually, for the first time since I've been doing this, having to tell people we don't have a driver. In the previous eleven years I did this, I bet I told a half a dozen people we didn't have a driver. We tell that many in a week right now, because we don't have enough drivers," said Schaefer.

There about 11 volunteer drivers, "so you can see that covering sixty to one-hundred requests is impossible," she said. Of those drivers two of them drive for four other counties, one drives just a few times a month — "which is fine, we'll take anybody. I always want the volunteers to know that they can

say 'no' anytime for no reason whatsoever, they are volunteers."

Part of the reason that they are having to turn people away is the number of requests they are receiving, and partially because there are not enough volunteers to cover those requests.

"I can't remember a time when we ever had a whole lot more volunteers than this, but we just have so many more requests

than we used to. When I took this program over twelve plus years ago, we were doing five to eight rides a week. One of the things we started doing after that was make sure people got rides when they asked for them. And over the years, that's word of mouth that gets out, and we hear that constantly from people who call is that 'so and so told me if I needed a ride I could call you.' Requests also come from out workers for their clients, but for everybody it's the same, any other program that's a ride, there's out there who needs to go to the hospital, times a week and they have to pay to get there, we'll help them," she said.

See VOLUNTEERS, Page 7A

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VOLUNTEERS / Continued from Page 1A

They also get requests from doctor's offices, hospitals, Community Mental Health, other service agencies and Michigan Works. "So we could really use some help if people like to drive. We go everywhere from within the county, we have a lot of rides in the county, probably once a month to Ann Arbor or the Detroit area. Most of our rides are either within the county or to Benzie County, Traverse City, Ludington, Cadillac, but we do go to Grand Rapids and Muskegon quite a bit," she said. One of the of the questions they ask volunteers, is if they like to drive in the county or on longer trips.

The program also uses a volunteer transportation assistant, Marilyn, for the dispatching of rides. "I couldn't run the program without her, she sets everything up," Schaefer added.

She says they also often use Dial-A-Ride anytime they can.

"Each county gets a certain amount of money used to support volunteer programs, and probably 99 percent of ours goes to direct transportation reimbursement costs," said Schaefer. The program is getting between 70 and 80 requests a week for rides.

For more information on the program contact volunteer transportation at (231) 398-4139.

Hawaii Reporter

Freedom to Report Real News

States Failing to Implement Critical Voting Rights Laws

By OMB Watch, 4/15/2008 2:52:43 PM

On April 1, the House Committee on Administration's Subcommittee on Elections held a hearing on state-level implementation of the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), in particular a provision that was designed to enable low-income Americans to register to vote more readily. According to testimony by witnesses at the hearing, many states are not offering voter registration at public assistance agencies and are failing to live up to the promise of the NVRA to provide more equal access to the opportunity to vote.

In 1993, the U.S. Congress passed the NVRA — also known as the "Motor Voter Act" — in order "to enhance voting opportunities for every American." The law is well known for mandating that voter registration be made available when people apply for or renew their drivers' licenses. Section 7 of the act requires that voter registration applications be made available at all state agencies offering public assistance programs including Food Stamps, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Medicaid, and at state offices providing services to persons with disabilities.

Michael Slater, Deputy Director of Project Vote, a nonprofit organization that promotes voter registration and voting to Americans historically underrepresented in the electorate, testified at the hearing on Project Vote's recent evaluation of Section 7 implementation. According to Project Vote's extensive analysis, Slater testified,

Voter registration at public assistance agencies has plummeted from 2.6 million in 1995-1996 to just 550,000 in 2005-2006, a 79 percent decrease. This decline cannot be explained by a decline in public assistance caseloads, the rate of citizenship among applicants, or registration rates of low-income individuals....the evidence points overwhelmingly to chronic and pervasive non-compliance by states.

Lisa J. Danetz of Demos, a nonpartisan public policy center focused on expanding democratic participation, affirmed Slater's testimony that registration is not being offered at public agencies in many states. In her testimony, Danetz reflected on the possible causes of the breakdown at the state agencies, saying, "This is not necessarily because of a deliberate effort to defy the law; it may just be that a lack of consistent oversight and training combined with high level of staff turnover at agencies has caused the issue to fall off the radar screen in many places."

According to the law, the Justice Department (DOJ) is responsible for enforcing the NVRA. Despite evidence of widespread noncompliance, however, the DOJ has only brought one lawsuit against a state for failure to implement Section 7 of the NVRA. In 2002, DOJ sued the state of Tennessee for not offering registrations as required by law. Danetz testified that as a result of the court order that followed, Tennessee implemented changes that led to a significant increase in voter registration at public agencies. The number of registrations at these locations nearly quadrupled. At the hearing, Subcommittee Chair Zoe Lofgren (D-CA) noted that the committee planned to send an inquiry to DOJ on the matter of Section 7 enforcement.

Two witnesses at the April 1 hearing testified on the challenges and benefits of implementing Section 7 at the state level. Their statements supported the claim by voting rights advocates that better state enforcement of Section 7 could have enormous impact on the number of citizens registered to vote. North Carolina's Chief Deputy Director of the State Board of Elections, Johnnie McLean, outlined North Carolina's efforts to improve voter registration at public assistance agencies. North Carolina instituted a program to reform its Section 7 implementation efforts after discovering that registrations at these locations had fallen by nearly 75 percent, despite increases in welfare rolls during that time.

McLean was asked by Rep. Susan Davis^a (D-CA) why she believes state agencies are neglecting their Section 7 duties. McLean responded, "Many state employees probably do not realize that it's a federal mandate."

The Civic Engagement Project Manager for the Michigan Department of Human Services, Catherine Truss, also testified on Michigan's efforts to comply with Section 7. Truss testified that the state of Michigan sees real value in ensuring that public agencies offer voter registrations, saying,

We believe that feeling as if your vote does not count or that your opinion does not matter is a significant barrier to self-sufficiency... Compliance with the National Voter Registration Act is not just another federal mandate; it is a key component for families to act on their own behalf and become part of the public debate.

A senior policy analyst from the Heritage Foundation, David B. Muhlhausen, countered the assertions by the other

witnesses that states are neglecting to implement Section 7. Referencing forthcoming data, Muhlhausen argued that two explanations better account for the decline in Section 7 registrations: one, that "voter registration drives by community mobilization organizations replaced the need for welfare recipients to register at public assistance offices," and two, "that welfare reform caused the decline in registrations."

Recent research by Project Vote and Demos — documented in their report *Unequal Access: Neglecting the National Voter Registration Act* — contradicts Muhlhausen's explanations.

In regard to Muhlhausen's claim that demand for voter registration by low-income Americans has been met by mobilization organizations, the report finds that millions of low-income Americans remain unregistered in spite of the registration efforts of nonprofits and other organizations.

In 2006, 13 million, or 40 percent, of voting-age citizens earning under \$25,000 were unregistered. The Unequal Access report also addresses Muhlhausen's second argument that declines in state welfare caseloads led to the decrease in Section 7 registrations.

The report asserts that although figures vary by state, the trend of decreasing caseloads generally reversed itself in the first years of this decade. For example, more adults are receiving assistance under the Food Stamps Program than in the 1990s.

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Case Coordinators network to fill Ottawa County's many needs

Tue, Apr 15, 2008

BY ABBEY PALMER

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More than 20 different organizations gathered together at the beginning of April to discuss current needs in Ottawa County.



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"We call ourselves the Case Coordinators," said Becky Eminger, director of the Lakeshore Pregnancy Center in Grand Haven.

More than 10 years ago, several organizations formed an alliance for the greater good of the county. Now, the monthly meetings draw organizations from all over the county, with each one looking to help out neighboring groups.

The meeting starts in a round table, where each person seated speaks about their organization and passes out information. They then discuss current needs in the community and how each member of the group can help the needs of the others.

"All we are really doing is networking," said Jane Anderson, housing case manager at the Salvation Army in Grand Haven. "If I am housing a family who needs diapers or a stroller for their baby, I know I have those resources to call Lakeshore Pregnancy and refer people there for additional help. Or if I was housing a family who was having a hard time, I could refer them to the (state) Department of Human Services for family counseling."

Karen Reenders, director of The People Center in Spring Lake, said all of the area pantries are swamped with people and very low on food.

"People come in every day asking for food, and the need is extremely high right now," she said.

Other top needs in the community are housing, transportation, and medical and dental care.

"You see, the community isn't aware of Case Coordinators," Anderson said. "We are a huge network available for people who have different needs for anything. We put together all of our resources and formed a huge network here to help those in Ottawa County."

Organizations involved in Case Coordinators include: the city of Grand Haven's Neighborhood Housing Services Department, Catholic Charities of West Michigan, Lakeshore Pregnancy Center, Ottawa County Friend of the Court, Love INC, The People Center, Child Development Services of Ottawa County, The Salvation Army, Great Start, Michigan Department of Human Services, Community Action Agency,

Barnabas Ministries and Ottawa County Homeless Youth Task Force.